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THE INFLUENCE OF THE AUTHORIZED VERSION ON ENGLISH LITERATURE

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The Authorized Version of 1611 marks the completion of the earlier attempt to translate the Bible into English, after the invention of printing.

Wycliffe's translation in 1382 was circulated in written manuscript. At that time, the thought of the Bible began to be sown more generally in English thinking. Copying with the pen was a slow and costly process. Moreover churchmen and statesmen were alarmed at the growing independent thinking of the peasantry who came under Lollard influence, and the reading of the manuscript was largely suppressed. But Scripture truth had fallen into genial minds and began to do its subsoil work.

In the following century political and material considerations became dominant. Discovery and invention captivated the mind. In European centers there was an inundation of classical learning. Schools and universities felt the breath of a new freedom. The printing-press, introduced into England in 1470, was first employed to bring forth Greek and Hebrew books. There was a desire to get back to the sources. The great body of the English people, however, were waiting for their advantage to come. William Tyndale, who shared the new culture of Oxford and Cambridge, also shared the desire which Wycliffe had felt, and he undertook the task of giving to the English people a printed translation of the Bible. His remark to a churchman, with whom he had a controversy over the project, indicates the need of the people at that time: "If God spare my life, ere many years, I will cause a boy that driveth a plough shall know more of the Scriptures than thou knowest." He lived to finish only the New Testament, the Pentateuch, and Jonah. His friend, Coverdale, completed the task, though not in the same thorough way, and brought forth the first printed

Bible in English in 1535. Then came the "Matthew Bible" in 1537, the "Great Bible" in 1539, the "Genevan Bible" in 1560, the "Bishops' Bible" in 1570. Because of its convenient size, plain type, division into chapter and verse, and marginal notes the Genevan Bible was most widely circulated. Previous to 1611 one hundred and twenty editions were called for.

It was in the midst of this first, frequent issue of printed Bibles that a newspaper of the time declared: "Englishmen have now in hand, in every church and place, the holy Bible in their mother tongue, instead of the old and fantastical books of the *Table Round*, *Lancelot du Lake*, *Bevis and Hampton*, *Guy of Warwick*, etc., and such other, whose impure filth and vain fabulosity the light of God has abolished utterly." It will thus be seen that the substance of Bible teaching had begun to flow in upon the English mind seventy years before the Authorized Version. Shakespeare is the most illustrious example of how thoroughly the loftiest thinking had become saturated with religious ideas. During the progress of work on this version, he was putting forth his greatest dramas. If one is disposed to question the influence of Bible thought on Shakespeare, because of many objectionable passages and the general worldliness of his plays, let him read such a book as that of William Burgess on *The Bible in Shakespeare*, and he will find proof massing and classifying itself beyond contradiction. Shakespeare not only found it in his heart to speak of

those holy fields
Over whose acres walked those blessed feet
Which fourteen hundred years ago were nailed
For our advantage on the bitter cross,

but his ideas of kindness, mercy, virtue, conscience, time, immortality, God, judgment, come from the Bible. He depicts vice, but through every plot and tangle he makes sure the coming of one inexorable refrain, "Be sure your sin will find you out."

It will be impossible to analyze the influence of Bible thought on English literature and separate that which began its work before 1611 and that which followed after. The literature of the Elizabethan period itself transmitted biblical influence, independently of the King James version. The only way to look at the

influence of this version is to regard the version as a continuity, or, rather, a culmination of endeavor to make a translation as nearly perfect as was then possible. There had been rivalry between the preceding issues, especially between the Genevan Bible and the Bishops' Bible. This was due to a growing mistrust between the then emerging Puritan and Anglican parties. The desire of King James for the stability of his reign favored a representative body of men as translators: so Anglican churchmen, Puritans, and laymen co-operated in the task.

Green, in his *History of the English People*, speaking of those early days of translation, says: "The Bible was the one book which was familiar to every Englishman; the whole moral effect which is produced now-a-days by the religious newspaper, the tract, the essay, the missionary report, the sermon, was then produced by the Bible alone; and its effect in this way, however dispassionately we examine it, was simply amazing. . . . All the prose literature of England, save the forgotten tracts of Wycliffe, has grown up since the translation of the Scriptures by Tyndale and Coverdale."

BIBLICAL FONTAL MATERIAL

What is the thought material in the Bible? The Hebrew race had a genius for religion. They were keenly susceptible to the mysteries, the limitations, the exposures, the tragedies, the helplessness, the profound questionings of this earthly life. They went to the roots of things, and, at the same time, preserved primitive simplicity. Their thinking was elemental. It did not indulge in abstract reasoning. It dealt with the plain facts of life, with instinct, feeling, intuition, subtle suggestion, duties, right and wrong, fear and hope. It was religion rather than theology. It kept within the realm of the concrete, the poetic, the popular; all the time thrilling with life's intense realism.

It furnished, therefore, what might be called fontal material. It was not finished product. It was, rather, germinal stuff appealing to the common mind and easily transferable into the popular language of any people. Here we have rich, cumulative layers of religious experience; and, growing out of it, convictions, ideals, responsibilities, inspiring hopes—all pictured forth in the fascinating

array of historic events and characters, passionate poetry, proverbial wisdom, and opening vistas on down into a glorious future.

The Hebrew mind dealt with the great themes of God, nature, and man; and all were brought into unity. There was groping at the first, but corrective thinking kept pushing itself into the ascendancy. "In the beginning God." Back of all medley appearances the One, Creator. Through Nature God flashes his revealings. In the human heart he whispers his will. Man is a child of God, therefore brother to every other man; and, because of this divine relationship, every human individual is of inestimable worth. This leads to the divine quest for man's restoration; and all God-like men must sympathize with that quest. Therefore human life has a dominant purpose, a mission, a responsibility.

Here is the nucleus, biblical statement pulsating with life. And, radiating from this center, we have scattered through the whole bulk of Scripture germinal truths, great rugged elemental characters, typical points of view and attitudes of soul, visions, ethical standards, clustering virtues, that reach out into the length and breadth of history, and appeal to man in the totality of his being. This is the fontal religious material of the Bible, ready to flow in upon the thinking and the literature of any people so fortunate as to have it translated into their own vernacular. The supreme value of the individual human being, because of his relation to God, is "the distinct contribution of Christianity." This constitutes the "logical substructure for the sentiments of sympathy and love." It was this which led self-sacrifice into its holy place, and brought humility in among the virtues to breathe upon them and give them interior genuineness and reality.

THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

In marked contrast with the sixteenth century, in which the drama was the most popular form of literature, the seventeenth century was characterized by great religious and political excitement. England now had become "the people of a book and that book was the Bible. It was the one English book familiar to every Englishman. . . . A new moral and religious impulse spread

through every class." Theology came to the front, and the pulpit, rather than the stage, was the center of agitation and moulding influence. Milton is the towering literary character of the time. Whether he writes political pamphlets, as in *Areopagitica*, on behalf of the free interchange of thought, or gives his mind to wondrous poetic venture in *Paradise Lost*, the Bible furnishes him with germinal truths. "However imbued the surface might be with classical literature," says Wordsworth, "he was a Hebrew in soul and in imaginative material." Milton believed that "truth is strong, next to the Almighty. She needs no policies nor stratagems." The state papers of Oliver Cromwell are saturated with Scripture teaching. Bunyan read scarcely any other book than the Bible, and his *Pilgrim's Progress* multiplied into more volumes than that of any other book save the Bible. *Paradise Lost* has been called "the epic of Puritanism in its external and theological aspect," while *Pilgrim's Progress* is "the epic of Puritanism in its inner and emotional phases."

Dryden belongs to another class, and yet he insisted that "conscience is the royalty and prerogative of every private man." In his celebrated satire, *Absalom and Achitophel*, he makes free use of Bible material: and, in response to Jeremy Collier, a clerical critic, he says, "I have pleaded guilty to all thoughts and expression of mine which can be truly argued of obscenity, profaneness or immorality, and retract them." Pepys, who was always on the lookout for whatever would picture the times as they were, makes note in his *Diary* of seeing a shepherd whose little boy was reading the Bible to him and said, "It was the most pleasant and innocent sight I ever saw."

There cannot be found a stronger, more influential cluster of writers, first preachers and then theologians, than that presented in Jeremy Taylor, Isaac Barrows, Richard Baxter, John Howe, and Robert South. Added to these we have the Quaker trio—George Fox, Robert Barclay, and William Penn. While for writers of hymns and beautiful religious lyrics we have Thomas Ken, Robert Herrick, George Herbert, and others. All these drink deep out of the one Book. And Sir Thomas Browne, quaint,

mystical, in a class by himself, though touched by doubts awakened in his scientific studies, shows that the inner spirit and lofty conceptions of the Bible are his main inspiration.

For scientists and philosophers in this period, whose work reaches to the excellence of literature, we may cite four names. Robert Boyle refused orders thinking he could serve religion more effectively as a layman. His "study of nature was blended with simple and deep religious feeling." He loved to discourse on the "excellency of theology as compared with natural philosophy." He had an Irish Bible published at his own expense. Isaac Newton spent much time in the study of the Bible, and, in the order of Nature, he found reason for increase of reverence for God. Ralph Cudworth, in writing the *True Intellectual System of the Universe*, devotes the introductory part to a refutation of atheism. John Locke, the father of English philosophy, wrote first of all *Three Letters concerning Toleration*. "Toleration is the chief characteristic mark of the true church." His *Essay concerning Human Understanding* came forth from a mind charged with simple piety. Materialistic philosophy might afterward manage to make a joining with some of his positions, but it was farthest from his thought. With the same pen he could write on *The Reasonableness of Christianity as Delineated in the Scriptures*.

THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

The eighteenth century is one of criticism, skeptical revolt, political revolution, turning to Nature for sources of literary activity, and introducing the essay and the novel to a firm place of power.

Daniel Defoe and Jonathan Swift, in their stories, allowed the moral element to have free play. *The Tale of the Tub* was written "in behalf of charity and good works among men of different faiths." There is a manifest attempt to broaden out sympathy for human life in humblest forms. Liberty of conscience is insisted upon: the Christian virtues are exalted. Oliver Goldsmith, Samuel Richardson, and Fannie Burney, in their several portrayals and delineations, follow this lead. Addison, Steele, and Samuel Johnson, in their essays, sought the improvement of morals. The

great middle class was now appealed to, and here, because of widespread biblical influence, deportment and conscience must be respected. The fling of the French critics is largely true, "the English mind is dominated by a sense of duty." Pope, who is the Dryden of this century, is under the sway of natural religion: but in his *Messiah* he paraphrases passages from Isaiah. William Cowper is well known to this generation as a writer of Christian hymns. Robert Burns, though giving over his marvelous powers to wanton literary license and dissolute life, showed in his "Cotter's Saturday Night" where his elemental strength came from. Edward Young, in *Night Thoughts*, sings of immortality and the consolations of religion. James Thompson in *The Seasons* blends with his appreciation of nature moral considerations, born of intimate acquaintance with the Bible, while Thomas Gray, author of the *Elegy in a Country Churchyard*, speaks of nature as "pregnant with religion and poetry."

Joseph Butler, in the *Analogy*, furnished a Christian apologetic which was used as a textbook for the next hundred years. Edmund Burke, the foremost representative statesman of England, looking across the continent to India, and across the Atlantic to America, insisted that the spirit of brotherhood should prevail, that political action must be founded on justice and humanity. And Samuel Adams, voicing the sentiment of the Pilgrim Fathers, replied in the language of Scripture, "What an affront to the King of the Universe to maintain that the happiness of a Charles is more precious in his sight than that of millions of his suppliant creatures who 'do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with their Lord.'" This tallied well with the opening of the Declaration of Independence. John Wesley in old England and Jonathan Edwards in New England became great names, not only in widespread religious revival but in religious literature, which overflowed on all sides into other related departments.

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

In the nineteenth century the novel and the essay continued to grow into even larger prominence, while the newspaper and the magazine sprang into phenomenal strength. The reading public

is wonderfully increasing. Democracy is coming to its own. Social and economic reforms start up on every hand and insist on the worth of the individual, the brotherhood of man, justice, fair play in everyday life. The scientific spirit leaps into the arena and calls for a reinterpretation of the facts of life and a readjustment of theories. A sense of responsibility takes possession of most of the leading writers. English literature, like Hebrew literature, throbs with the impulse of a conscious mission.

The two dominant literary characters at the dawn of the century, Wordsworth and Coleridge, did not share in this spirit; they did, however, give utterance to freedom of religious instinct; they taught secret lessons which lie at the heart of common things, and led the soul out of technical and ritual narrowness into the largeness of Nature's open, everyday revelation. Coleridge's *Aids to Reflection* shows where he gets his fontal ideas, and his expression, "The Bible finds me," contains in germ the theory of "inspiration" as it is yet to prevail.

Walter Scott is the first of the great novelists. He paints scenes true to historic reality, but he "accepted religion as the background of a sane and healthy life." The portrayal of Jeanie Deans goes well with his last saying to Lockhart, when he would rest his soul on the truth of Scripture, "there is but one Book." Bulwer Lytton in *Paul Clifford* writes, as he says, "to call attention to vicious prison discipline and a sanguinary penal code." Dickens holds up to execration the ill-treatment of children, the wretchedness of the school system, the infamies of the workhouse, and the cruelty of the law governing debt. Thackeray took the title of his *Vanity Fair* from "the most widely read religious volume next to the Bible," and he said to his mother, concerning his purpose in the making of this book, "What I want is, to make a set of people, living without God in the world." Charles Reade writes *Put Yourself in His Place*. Charles Kingsley in *Yeast* and *Alton Locke* writes to men in religious and industrial perplexity. George Macdonald thought theologically while he was writing fiction. Mrs. Elizabeth Gaskell introduces the problems of the employer and the employed. George Eliot, while cutting herself aloof from the church, could not get away from early reli-

gious training. Her delineation of the character, Dinah Morris, and her prevailing, subtle, psychological analysis of conduct, lifting conscience to its inner throne, shows how great her debt was to the Bible. "No writer of the first rank has more persistently rung the changes upon the great ethical principle of Christianity, 'whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap.'" Nathaniel Hawthorne introduces us into "the realm of the burdened conscience longing for peace with groanings which cannot be uttered," while Harriet Beecher Stowe, lifting the plaintive cry of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, gave it wings to fly to the hearts of the English-speaking race. Robert Louis Stevenson, unconventional though he was, speaks of the Bible in this way: "Written in the East, these characters live forever in the West; . . . penned in rude times, they are prized more and more as civilization advances." In later years, especially, novels have been the medium for a thorough discussion of theological, sociological, and industrial situations.

Tennyson lived through all the scientific problems of his day and keenly felt their perplexity. Poet laureate of the Victorian Age, he, like the queen he served, was true to the Bible virtues and sang his way through doubt and fear to the triumphing of Christian hope. The queen declared that the Bible held the secret of the glory of her reign. Robert Browning, not only in "Easter Day," "Christmas Eve," "Saul," "A Death in the Desert," but in the great bulk of his poetry, shows how intensely he thrills with moral purpose. And when Kipling rises to his best, he gives us "The Recessional." Bryant, Longfellow, Lowell, Whittier breathe the Puritan spirit. It was the verdict of Joseph H. Choate that, "When the Pilgrim Fathers and Puritans came to New England, they carried with them, as their best possession, King James' Bible, on which their infant state was built."

Carlyle is a Hebrew prophet stalking through these modern days, crying out, "I do not want cheaper cotton, swifter railways. . . . I want God, freedom, immortality." Emerson stepped out of the pulpit onto a larger platform, but he was a preacher of righteousness to the last, only with wider margins thrown in. And Ruskin, speaking for himself, though he might as well have spoken for Carlyle and Emerson also, says, "I have

with deeper gratitude to chronicle what I owe to my mother for the resolutely consistent lessons which so exercised me in the Scriptures, as to make every word of them familiar to my ear in habitual music . . . yet in a familiarity revered, as transcending all thought and ordaining all conduct."

Statesmen like Brougham, Shaftsbury, Bright, and Gladstone, Washington, John Marshall, Webster, and Lincoln frankly acknowledge their deep indebtedness to the Bible. This was the one book of Lincoln's cabin home. The moral truth of it, as well as the Anglo-Saxon style, got into his blood.

During this century the press in its editorial columns had to be reckoned with, as well as the pulpit and the congressional hall. Not a few men wielded the pen, after the fashion of Horace Greeley, who stated it as his belief, "It is impossible to mentally or socially enslave a Bible-reading people." Charles Dana, a master of journalism, speaking to younger comrades in the craft declares: "The most indispensable, the most useful book, the one whose knowledge is the most effective, is the Bible. There is no book from which more valuable lessons can be learned. I am considering it now, not as a religious book, but as a manual of utility, of professional preparation and professional use for the journalist."

The printed sermons of men like John Henry Newman, F. W. Robertson, Canon Liddon, James Martineau, W. E. Channing, Horace Bushnell, Henry Ward Beecher, and Phillips Brooks came to take undisputed place in literature; while on the lecture platform such men as William Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips, Father Theobald Matthew, John B. Gough, Beecher, Chapin, and George William Curtis brought in a unique contribution, reinforcing social, political, and personal reform.

The scientific spirit has in these later years brought into overshadowing importance two departments of literature—that which has to do with the relations of science and theology and that which has to do with the historical criticism of the Bible. In the thick of controversy with the agnostic spirit, here and there, to some minds, the Bible might seem to be waging, at last, a losing battle; but Huxley, the apostle of agnosticism, after all is said and done, makes this frank acknowledgment: "I have been seriously perplexed to

know how the religious feeling, which is the essential base of conduct, can be kept up without the use of the Bible. For three centuries has it been woven into the life of all that is best and noblest in English history." Historical criticism has come to emphasize the Bible as literature. Though, at first, this might appear to be simply destructive of old ideas about the sacred writings, it brings out into clearer, progressive and corrective light the essential ethical and spiritual values which make it the germinal, dynamic book it has proved to be.

The biblical doctrine of the brotherhood of man has wonderfully branched out, during this last century, into two great departments of literature, as well as of endeavor, namely, missionary and sociological. Bible-inspired men and women have girdled the world with their evangel, piercing the darkest corners with gospel light and the radiant glow of apostolic example. Heroic deeds have given birth to heroic missionary literature. And men who believe that salvation, if genuine, begins here and now, have risen up and emphasized the need of applying the inner law of it to the everyday affairs of life: not only to the individual and the church, but also to state, business, social life, home life, down to the minutest details of correct sanitation. The Good Samaritan must be multiplied by every brother man. Not alone the road to Jericho, but every road and by-path must blossom with thoughtful good-will. The voice of Christian sociology is heard in the land, echoing more and more loudly from a rapidly growing department of literature.

This article has been little more than sketchy and suggestive. It may well close with the words of Austin Phelps, not so very different from those of Huxley, and emphasizing the same substantial testimony: "When we speak of the sway of European and American mind, we speak of the conquests of the Scriptures. The elemental ideas lie at the foundation of it. Christianity has wrought revolutions of opinion; it has thrown into the world so much of original thought . . . that now the noblest type of civilization cannot be conceived of otherwise than as a debtor to the Christian Scriptures, like the debt of vegetation to light."